

Let Me See Thy Glory:

Study of the Attributes of God

Preface

No study is of more importance or value than a study of the nature and attributes of God. It is our hope that these messages will enhance your knowledge of God, resulting in a greater love for Him and for others.

This material is from a series of messages on the attributes of God delivered by Bob Deffinbaugh, a teaching elder at Community Bible Chapel in Richardson, Texas. Anyone is at liberty to use this material for educational purposes, with or without credit. Community Bible Chapel believes the material contained in this series to be true to the Word of God, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid to the study of God's Word.

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Lesson 1: Exploring the Excellencies of God

Introduction

The religion section of the Dallas Morning News recently contained an article entitled, "Letting God Grow Up." {1} Rabbi Jack Bemporad, a leader in Jewish-Christian dialogue, has co-authored a new book, *Stupid Ways, Smart Ways to Think about God*. From reading only this article, Bemporad seems to be saying that we must forsake what we have learned about God as children and think of God in more adult terms. While I can agree with some of the author's ideas, overall I must differ with him. For example, the article informs us,

To a large extent, atheists seldom reject a credible God but usually 'reject some stupid way of thinking about God,' the authors say, calling some ideas about God 'so ridiculous they are not worth believing.'

Some "childish" ideas about God are wrong and should be rejected. Among these is the thought that God is a "cosmic bellhop ... ready to serve you." Disturbingly, however, Rabbi Bemporad also includes the concept of God's wrath as a childish idea. I think he is basically saying: "Men believe in the kind of God they wish to believe in and reject the kind of God they dislike." He seems to place little emphasis, if any, on the description of God found in the Holy Scriptures. Bemporad seems to believe our theology needs to adjust to our desires, rather than recognizing that we must adjust our theology to who God really is.

Although I am hardly surprised by them, I certainly do not agree with the views unbelievers hold of God. But even more distressing is the shallow, inaccurate view of God held by professing Christians. We desperately need in our time to radically revise our thinking about God. The purpose of this series is to explore the excellencies of God, to realign our thinking about God with those divine characteristics revealed in the Scriptures.

This lesson attempts to demonstrate the importance of studying the attributes of God. We shall first consider the testimony of some great men of God before looking at some of the practical benefits of such a study as taught in the Scriptures. Finally, we will see how the attributes of God impacted the lives of two great men of old, Job and Moses. My hope is that this lesson will stimulate you to begin your own personal study of the attributes of God. It is a study which could transform your life.

The Testimony of Great Men of God

Throughout history, great men of God have devoted themselves to the study of God's character and encouraged others to do likewise. Consider what some of those men of God have to say about studying the attributes of God.

Over 30 years ago, A. W. Tozer wrote concerning the desperate need for the church to revise its concept of God due to a very distorted conception of him:

It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity. {2}

Tozer goes on to say, The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him — and of her. {3}

A. W. Pink is of the same opinion:

The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds. {4}

In one of his letters to Erasmus, Martin Luther said, "Your thoughts of God are too human." {5} Speaking for God, the psalmist of old penned the same thought in these words:

These things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state [the case] in order before your eyes. {Ps 50:21}

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of the study of God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon's words are often quoted by those who embark upon a study of the attributes of God:

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. {6}

The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought "I am but of yesterday and know nothing." {7}

The study of God's nature and character is the high calling of the Christian and is of great importance and practical value:

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent'. {Joh 17:3} What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. 'Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me'. {Jer 9:23f}

What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives him most pleasure? Knowledge of himself. 'I desire ... the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,' says God {Ho 6:6} ... Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord ... What makes life worth while is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christian has, in a way that no other man has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God? {8}

The Practical Relevance of God's Character to the Christian

But is the study of God's character not just a matter for preachers and theologians? Does such a study really have any practical value? J. I. Packer raises this very question and promptly answers it:

Why need anyone take time off today for the kind of study you propose? Surely a layman, at any rate, can get on without it? After all, this is 1972, not 1855. A fair question! — but there is, I think, a convincing answer to it. The questioner clearly assumes that a study of the nature and character of God will be unpractical and irrelevant for life. In fact, however, it is the most practical project anyone can engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives ... Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul. {9}

As we commence a study of the attributes of God, I would like to challenge you to embrace this endeavor as your own personal commitment. Consider the following ways the study of the attributes of God impacts the life of the Christian.

(1) The way to "see" God is to come to know him through a study of his character as revealed in the Scriptures.

No man can see God and live. {Ex 33:20} No man has seen God at any time. {Joh 1:18} Men have "seen" God partially at various times when he has appeared in various forms (see Ex 24:9-11 33:17-34:7 Isa 6:5). In every instance when God manifested himself visibly to men, there is only a partial revelation of his glory, for man could no more look upon the full display of God's splendor than one can look directly into the sun. Even in the coming of our Lord, who manifested the Father to men (see Joh 1:18 14:8-9 Heb 1:1-3), the full revelation of his glory was "**veiled**" with only an occasional glimpse of that glory, such as at his transfiguration (see Mt 17:1-8). It was not the physical appearance of our Lord which impressed men. Indeed, we know absolutely nothing about our Lord's physical appearance, other than it was not particularly appealing or attractive so men might be drawn to him on the basis of his appearance alone (see Isa 53:2).

We are among those who have not "**seen**" our Lord (Joh 20:29 1Pe 1:8). Our grasp of the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ must be limited to what the Scriptures teach concerning his teaching, ministry, and character. In the final analysis, we can "see" and know God through the Scriptures as they reveal his character to us.

(2) The character of God is the basis and standard for all human morality.

The final verse of Judges reads:

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. {Jud 21:25}

One might think the solution to this dilemma was a human king, but it was not. The kind of "king" Israel wanted was in effect an idol. They wanted a king whom they could see, a man who would go before them into battle. They wanted a king like all the other nations (see De 17:14-17). When the people approached Samuel and demanded to have a king, God indicated they really were rejecting him as their king:

5 And they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." 6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord 7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." {1Sa 8:5-7}

Thus when the Israelites demanded a human king, they were rejecting God as their king. When the Book of Judges informs us the Israelites had no king, it means the nation did not acknowledge and serve God as their King (Ex 15:18 Ps 10:16 29:10). And it is without God as King that men set the standard for their own conduct; every man **"does what is right in his own eyes."**

God gave the Law to the nation Israel after he became their "King" at the exodus. {Ex 15:18} He demonstrated his power and sovereignty, even over Pharaoh. And as Israel's "King," God set down the constitution for the kingdom he was setting out to establish. The form of the Mosaic Covenant, as has been observed by scholars, was the same as other treaties of that day between kings (or suzerains) over their subjects (or vassals). God was the standard of morality, and God therefore set the standard for the conduct of his people. The laws God set down at Mount Sinai were those which proceeded from his own character. God said to his people, **"Be ye holy, for I am Holy"** (Le 11:44-45 19:2 20:7; see 1Pe 1:16).

Is it any wonder **"every man does what is right in his own eyes"** today? Is it so difficult to explain why our culture rejects and abhors the thought of moral absolutes? Do we wonder why the church has become so wishy-washy about morality? The Bible tells us why. ***We have ceased to ponder and appreciate the moral perfection of God.*** And once our view of the holiness of God is diminished, our moral values decline proportionately. A study of the character of God will establish and undergird morality.

(3) Failure to think rightly about God is the sin of idolatry, and it leads to countless other sins.

Tozer rightly identifies mistaken or distorted views of God as idolatry:

Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on his character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than he is ... "Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him." {10}

Thinking wrongly of God is idolatry and is demeaning to him because it always views God as being other (and less) than he is. But this idolatrous evil of thinking wrongly of God is also the root of many other evils. Thinking wrongly about God leads to sin. Tozer writes,

I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God. {11}

Wrong thoughts about God were the root of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. In Ge 3, the character of God is first demeaned by Satan. By Satan's devious question and answer tactics, God is portrayed as a liar ("**Has God said ... ?**" verse 1), ("**you surely shall not die!**" verse 4). Based upon the assumption that God was less than he first seemed to be (and was!), Eve acted independently of God, and she and her husband thus disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. An inadequate view of God is at the root of many sins.

(4) Knowing God intimately is our calling and destiny, our future hope, our great privilege and blessing, and thus it should be our great ambition.

Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches." {Jer 9:23}

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. {1Co 13:12}

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. {Php 3:10}

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him just as he is. {1Jo 3:2}

14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. {Eph 3:14-19}

(5) A study of the attributes of God is the basis for our enjoyment of God and our spiritual growth.

A personal relationship with God requires that we know God personally, as a Person. The attributes of God are descriptions of the character of God, and it is through the knowledge of his characteristics that we come to intimately know and enjoy God as a Person.

By faith in Jesus Christ, we have been saved so "**we might become partakers of the divine nature**". {2Pe 1:4} We have become a part of the church, the body of Christ, which is growing up "**to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ**". {Eph 4:13} By "**seeing him as he is**" we become like him; {1Jo 3:2} knowing God's character is therefore the basis for our own transformation into his likeness.

(6) The attributes of God are foundational to our faith and hope.

Knowing the character of God assures us that he can and will do all that he purposes and promises. Faith in God is trusting in God, and his attributes are the basis for that trust because he is able and willing to do all that he has promised.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. {Heb 10:23}

And without faith it is impossible to please [him], for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of those who seek him. {Heb 11:6}

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. {1Pe 4:19}

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. {1Jo 1:9}

(7) A study of the attributes of God enhances our worship.

We worship God for who he is. *The attributes of God are a description of who he is.* When God is worshipped in the Bible, he is worshipped in response to his attributes. He is worshipped as the eternal One:

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, [is] THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." {Re 4:8}

Especially in the Psalms we find the worship of God linked to an acknowledgment of his attributes:

I will give thanks to the LORD according to his righteousness, And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High. {Ps 7:17}

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; For his lovingkindness is everlasting. {Ps 107:1}

(8) A study of the attributes of God should enhance our prayer life.

Knowing God's character not only instructs us about what we should pray for — that which is in accord with his character — but it also assures us God is able and willing to answer our prayers. We do not pray to just anyone; we pray to him who hears our prayers and is willing and able to answer them. Once again, in the Book of Psalms we see the petitions of men linked to the attributes of God.

1 (For the choir director; for flute accompaniment. A Psalm of David.) Give ear to my words, oh LORD, Consider my groaning. 2 Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to thee do I pray. 3 In the morning, oh LORD, thou wilt hear my voice; In the morning I will order [my prayer] to thee and [eagerly] watch. 4 For thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with thee. 5 The boastful shall not stand before thine eyes; thou dost hate all who do iniquity. {Ps 5:1-5}

(9) A study of the attributes of God enhances our witness.

Men can only be saved when they come to recognize they are lost, and *they will see their sin only when they begin to recognize God as the One who is holy and righteous and just*. Paul's conversion is a dramatic illustration of this recognition of human depravity in the light of God's glory (see Ac 9:1-22).

Our principle task is not the winning of souls, but the demonstration and promotion of God's glory:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. {1Co 10:31}

9 But you are A Chosen Race, A royal Priesthood, A Holy Nation, A People For [God's] Own Possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; 10 for you once were Not A People, but now you are The People Of God; you had Not Received Mercy, but now you have Received Mercy {1Pe 2:9-10}

The attributes of God are both his characteristics and his "**excellencies**." His nature and character are his excellence, his perfection, his glory. Knowing God's excellence is the starting point for practicing and proclaiming it among men. In so doing, some will be saved, but God will be glorified whether or not men are saved. The elect will be saved to the glory of God, {Ro 9:23} and the lost will glorify God in the day of his visitation. {1Pe 2:11-12}

(10) Seeking to know the character of God enhances and enriches our study of the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are the primary source for our instruction concerning God's attributes. {12} As we seek to learn the character of God, we will soon discover that we have a new outlook on the Scriptures. Even those texts we may have considered boring come to life as we begin to see God's character described therein. Imagine coming to the place where, like David, we could pray these words concerning the Old Testament law:

15 I will meditate on thy precepts, And regard thy ways. 16 I shall delight in thy statutes; I shall not forget thy word. 17 Deal bountifully with thy servant, That I may live and keep thy word. 18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from thy law. {Ps 119:15-18}

Oh how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day. {Ps 119:97}

Seemingly obscure and difficult to understand portions of the Bible come to life when we look to them for insight into the character of God. Prophetic texts (like the Book of Revelation) have much to tell us

about God's character. Perhaps we spend too much time and effort trying to solve mysteries we were not intended to comprehend (see De 29:29) rather than focusing on the character of God, which is often quite clearly portrayed in highly symbolic or obscure texts. When we come to the Scriptures to learn what God is like, we shall not be disappointed.

(11) When we focus on the attributes of God, we begin to view life from a new perspective — from God's perspective.

Nothing will more radically change the way we look at life and our circumstances. In Ps 73, Asaph confesses that when he began to view his life from God's perspective he saw things in an entirely different light. When our desire is to know God, to know his nature and character, then we welcome those circumstances which facilitate a more intimate acquaintance with God. And so the apostle Paul tells us that he welcomes suffering when it facilitates knowing God:

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from [the] Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which [comes] from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. {*Php 3:8-10*}

A desire to know God intimately by the knowledge of his character puts our service into perspective and protects us from what some call "burn out." Think of the account of Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke:

38 Now as they were traveling along, he entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's word, seated at his feet. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up [to him,] and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but [only] a few things are necessary, really [only] one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." {*Lu 10:38-42*}

Mary chose the "one thing," the "better thing," to worship and adore the Lord, sitting at his feet, delighting in all that he is. Martha chose a lesser thing and became embittered that Mary was not working with her. When knowing God becomes our priority, serving him becomes an outworking of our devotion, not a hindrance to it.

The Testimony of Men in the Scriptures

A study of the attributes of God — seeing God as he is — is a life-transforming experience. Seeing God in his greatness and glory has transformed lives. Knowing God as fully as possible was the goal of the great men and women of God in the Bible. The great men of the Bible were those who had a passion to know God; they were men who had come to "see" God. Let us now focus our attention on two men whose lives were transformed by gaining a greater grasp of the attributes of God.

Job, by God's assessment, was "**a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil**". {*Job 1:8*} God allowed a series of disasters to afflict Job through the agency of Satan. Job was "counseled" by three friends, which only added further to his suffering. Job was weakening under the weight of his afflictions when God personally rebuked him. God did not explain to Job why he had allowed suffering to disrupt his life. He did not inform Job of Satan's involvement or of his own purpose for all that had taken place. God simply reminded Job that he was God and of some of his attributes as God (Job 38-41). He reminded Job of his finite nature and his fallibility. Job repented. He no longer asked to know why God was working as he was in his life. He no longer needed to know. All he needed to know was that what was happening was God's work, and that God, as God, would and could do what was

best. The attributes of God put Job back on track, spiritually speaking, and assured him that if he knew God, he knew enough. His suffering was never explained, because it ultimately came from the hand of God.

Notice these words, at the end of the Book of Job:

And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has." {Job 42:7 }

These words indicate something very important, for they reveal that God distinguished between Job and his response to his affliction and his three friends with their response to his affliction. Job's friends were wrong! They needed to repent. Their error? They did not speak what was right about God.

Job had spoken rightly about God, but when? I think Job spoke rightly about God at the beginning of his troubles {Job 1:21-22 } and then at the end of them when he repented:

1 Then Job answered the Lord, and said, 2 "I know that thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. 3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." 4 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask thee, and do thou instruct me.' 5 "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees thee; 6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." {Job 42:1-6 }

Job is saying: "Before my suffering, I knew *about* you. But, now, after my suffering and after your words of rebuke (reminding me about your attributes), I have now come to *know* you." Job "heard of God" by the hearing of the ear, but now Job "has seen God." Job came to know God more fully. Job's suffering served the higher purposes of God of which Job was still ignorant. But they also served God's purpose for Job, which was to cause him to more fully know and appreciate God's attributes, and thus to more fully know God. The attributes of God caused Job to *think rightly* about God and to thus *respond rightly* to his suffering.

Moses was likewise radically changed as a result of his increasing knowledge of the attributes of God. Consider the sequence of events in Moses' life which revealed to him the attributes of God and in turn brought about increasing intimacy with God.

Moses' first encounter with God is described in Ex 3:

1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 he said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God ... 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And he said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and he said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God

of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is my memorial-name to all generations."
{Ex 3:1-6,11-15 }

Moses' first encounter with God revealed several important attributes of God, even if he failed to grasp or believe them. *First*, Moses was instructed that the God of Israel is an eternal God. The burning bush did not "burn up"; it simply "burned on." The flaming bush was a symbolic manifestation of God, who is eternal. He, like the fire, does not end. And so, in this same encounter, God told Moses one of his names. God is the great and eternal "I AM" (verse 14). Moses would come to appreciate the eternality of God in the years to come. Is it any wonder the one psalm (90) Moses penned was a psalm reflecting on the eternality of God?

Secondly, Moses was assured of God's continual presence with him as he went to Egypt to carry out his divinely given task (see verse 12). This never-ending presence is celebrated by David in Ps 139 and is assured the disciples by our Lord in his giving of the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20; see also Heb 13:5). Moses would soon be appealing to God to do as he had promised (see Ex 33:12-16 34:8-9).

Thirdly, in Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush, he was instructed about the holiness of God. Moses was told not to come near to the bush and to take off his sandals for the ground around that bush was holy. {Ex 3:5-6 } The holiness of God would become a prominent theme in Moses' ministry.

If Moses was kept at a distance from God in Ex 3, the remainder of the Book of Exodus describes Moses' intense desire to draw near to God to know him more fully. When God delivered Israel from Egypt, he appeared in the form of a cloud, separating them from the Egyptians and leading them into the promised land (see Ex 14:19-20). On Mount Sinai, where God gave the Law to the Israelites, he manifested himself to the nation by fire, smoke, a cloud, thunder and lightening, and earth quaking. {Ex 19:16-19 } The people and the priests were kept at a distance and not allowed to even gaze upon God. {Ex 19:21-25 }

A very unusual thing takes place in Ex 24. Moses, along with Aaron and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, accompanied by 70 of the elders of the people, are granted a special manifestation of the glory of God:

9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel; and under his feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. 11 Yet he did not stretch out his hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank. {Ex 24:9-11 }

And yet after this amazing revelation of God to these leaders of the nation, in the absence of Moses they took part in the making of an idol against emphatic instructions of God to the contrary:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 you shall have no other gods before me. 4 you shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 you shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments." {Ex 20:2-6 }

1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 And Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring [them] to me." 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears, and brought [them] to Aaron. 4 And he took [this] from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, oh Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." 5 Now when Aaron saw [this,] he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow [shall be] a feast to the LORD." 6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. {Ex 32:1-6 }

How amazing! These Israelites had witnessed God's triumph over the "gods" of Egypt at the exodus. They sang praises to him after they passed through the Red Sea. {Ex 15:1-18} They saw the spectacular manifestations of God's presence on the mountain. Aaron and his sons and 70 of the leaders of the nation were privileged to eat a meal in God's presence. And yet, after the absence of Moses for a short time, they were willing to make an idol in direct disobedience to what they had just been commanded.

God threatened to wipe out this rebellious people. He offered to make a new nation from the offspring of Moses. {Ex 32:9-10} Moses pled with God to have mercy on his people, and thus fulfill his promise to Abraham, and to bring glory to himself among the nations (see Ex 32:11-13). God withheld his wrath and promised to be with Moses as he led the people into the promised land. But he would keep his distance from this obstinate people:

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2 And I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3 [Go up] to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, lest I destroy you on the way." {Ex 33:1-3}

While God kept his distance from the stiff-necked Israelites, he drew nearer to Moses so that he alone enjoyed an intimacy with God unmatched since the Garden of Eden:

7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And it came about, that everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. 9 And it came about, whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the Lord would speak with Moses. 10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. 11 Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. {Ex 33:7-11}

One would think Moses would be satisfied with such an intimacy with God, but he was not. He wanted more, more of God. Wanting to know God more intimately, he made this petition:

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, thou dost say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But thou thyself hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Moreover, thou hast said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'" 13 "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, so that I may find favor in thy sight. Consider too, that this nation is thy people." 14 And he said, "My presence shall go [with you,] and I will give you rest." 15 Then he said to him, "If thy presence does not go [with us,] do not lead us up from here. 16 For how then can it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not by thy going with us, so that we, I and thy people, may be distinguished from all the [other] people who are upon the face of the earth?" 17 And the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in my sight, and I have known you by name." 18 Then Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory!" {Ex 33:12-18}

The answer to Moses' request is recorded in the following verses:

19 And he said, "I myself will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." 20 But he said, "You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live!" 21 Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand [there] on the rock; 22

and it will come about, while my glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take my hand away and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." ... 1 Now the LORD said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. 2 So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. 3 And no man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain." 4 So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. 5 And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. 6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet he will by no means leave [the guilty] unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." 8 And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. {Ex 33:19-34:8}

This incident in the life of Moses should instruct us certainly, but it should also motivate us to follow in his footsteps. We can find a number of lessons in this text for us.

(1) Living close to God is dangerous for those who harbor sin and unrighteousness. God made it clear that sinful men must keep their distance. {Ex 19:21-24} If God were present among his people and they persisted in their sin, he would destroy them. {Ex 33:3} Sinful men cannot fellowship with a holy God as sinners.

(2) God desires to fellowship with men, and he provides the means for fellowship. God revealed himself to the Israelites, to their leaders, and especially to Moses. God wanted to manifest his glory to men. He glorified himself in Egypt by the defeat of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He glorified himself by delivering the nation Israel and by keeping his covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants.

God manifests his glory to his chosen ones so they may worship and serve him. Men cannot fellowship with God because of their sin. Moses petitioned God to go with them into the promised land and also to forgive them of their sins. {Ex 34:9} Because of man's sin, God made provision for his people to fellowship with him. First, God called his people apart so they could worship him (see Ex 4:22-23).

Then God gave his people the Law, which distinguished the holy from the unholy. The Law defined that which is displeasing and detestable in God's sight. He also provided barriers which kept certain boundaries between God and men. The tabernacle was one such barrier. Only one man went into the holy of holies once a year. And finally God provided blood sacrifices so that sinful men might be forgiven and thereby enter into fellowship with him. *When the Lord Jesus was crucified on Calvary, he was the full and final sacrifice, having died for sin once for all, so that now there are no barriers between men and God for those who are forgiven and justified in Christ* (see Heb 9 and Heb 10).

(3) Knowing God was the incentive for Moses to know him even more intimately. When God first appeared to Moses, he was afraid to look at him, and so he hid his face. {Ex 3:6} By Ex 33, Moses pleads with God to behold him in his glory. What could have prompted this change in Moses? I believe it was his growing knowledge of God. No man had ever been privileged to fellowship with God as had Moses. God met regularly with Moses and spoke with him **"face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend"**. {Ex 32:11} And yet Moses wanted more of God. The more we come to know God, the more we wish to know him. Knowing God produces both the motivation and the means for knowing him further.

(4) Not knowing God intimately prompts us to keep our distance from God and finally results in idolatry — creating a "god" of our own making. This we learn from the nation Israel. They were instructed to keep their distance from God, and they wanted it this way. Let Moses intercede with God. Let him live dangerously by coming into close contact with him. They would keep their distance. And yet they soon were busily fashioning and worshipping a "god" of their own making, a "god" who could be near them. But this was not the same God who gave them his Law, who forbade idolatry and immorality. This was a

"god" whom they could worship and serve while sinning. And so they did, to their own destruction. When we do not seek to know God, we find ourselves drawing back from him and eventually fashioning a "god" of our own making.

(5) Moses' motivation was that God knew him fully, and thus, he wished to know God more fully.

12b Moreover, thou hast said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'

13 "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, so that I may find favor in thy sight. Consider too, that this nation is thy people." *{Ex 33:12-13 }*

There is a very close relationship between being known by God and seeking to know God (see 1Co 8:3 13:12 Ga 4:9).

(6) Moses wished to know God more fully in order to serve him better. Moses' desire to know God more fully was not self-serving. He sought to know God more intimately in order to be able to fulfill his calling of leading the nation Israel:

12 Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, thou dost say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But thou thyself hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Moreover, thou hast said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'" 13 "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, so that I may find favor in thy sight. Consider too, that this nation is thy people." *{Ex 33:12-13 }*

Moses was commanded to bring the people of Israel up into the land of promise. How could he do so if he did not know him who was to go with him. To see God more fully was to be better prepared to serve him.

(7) Moses wished to know God more fully, not just for his own sake but for the sake of others. Moses had already been assured of God's presence with him. *{Ex 3:12 33:14 }* Moses seeks both a greater revelation of God's glory and for his presence with his people, Israel. *{Ex 33:15-16 34:9 }* All through this text in Ex 33 and Ex 34, Moses is interceding for the nation Israel. His personal request to see God's glory is linked to his petition that God be present with his people.

(8) Knowing God is to know his "ways," to know his character. Moses pled with God, 13 "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, so that I may find favor in thy sight." *{Ex 33:13 }*

We cannot know God intimately and personally without knowing God's character, his "**ways**." This is why Moses pled with God to know his ways, that he might know him.

(9) The grace of God is both the basis and the goal of knowing God. Look at these words of Moses one more time:

13 "Now therefore, I pray thee, *if I have found favor in thy sight*, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, *so that I may find favor in thy sight*." *{Ex 33:14, emphasis mine }*

Do you see it? The expression, "**I have found favor (or grace) in thy sight**" is repeated in this one verse. Having found favor in God's sight, Moses can appeal to God to know him more fully. And coming to know God more fully is sought in order to find God's favor. Grace is both the basis and the outcome of knowing God — and it is all of God's grace.

(10) God's character is his glory. Finally, notice the revelation of God's glory is the revelation of God's character:

5 And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord 6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and

gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet he will by no means leave [the guilty] unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." {Ex 34:5-7 }

What constitutes God's glory? God's full glory cannot be seen by men, even by a man like Moses. It would be something like trying to look directly into the full radiance of the sun. But God did reveal to Moses some of his attributes. The splendor and blaze of the physical manifestation of God on that mount was but a visual symbol of the glory of his person, his character. God's grace and compassion are his glory. His lovingkindness is his glory. His faithfulness is his glory. His holiness and justice are his glory.

Conclusion

My sincere hope is that each of us could join with Moses and say with him, "**Let me see thy glory.**" *There is no greater joy and privilege in life than to behold the glory of God.* Heaven will be enjoying the glory of God for all eternity — and we can start now. *But if we would see God's glory, we must study his attributes.* And we dare not study them as mere academic qualities. These are the characteristics of God as a Person. And the outcome of our study should be that of Moses. We should respond in worship and the service which is its expression (see Ex 34:8-9). Let us not only seek to see the glory of God personally but also seek to bring others into his presence as well, to his glory.

A study of the attributes of God allows no casual bystanders. We either respond in worship and service, or we turn from God, creating in his place a "lesser god" of our own making, a "god" in whose presence we feel comfortable, even while we sin. As we commence this study, may we do so with great zeal, with our eyes open wide to what this study requires of us.

{1 } "Letting God grow up," by George W. Cornell, *The Dallas Morning News*, Saturday, March 5, 1994, p. 44A.

{2 } A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961), p. 10.

{3 } Ibid., p. 12.

{4 } Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, pp. 28-29.

{5 } Cited by Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 28.

{6 } C. H. Spurgeon, as cited by Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 80.

{7 } Sermon on Mal 3:6, by C. H. Spurgeon, as cited in Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 80.

{8 } J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 29-30.

{9 } Ibid., pp. 14-15.

{10 } A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 11.

{11 } Ibid., p. 10.

{12 } We know there are three primary sources of revelation concerning the character of God: God's creation, nature (Ps 19:1-6 Ro 1:18-20), the Son of God (Joh 1:14-18 Heb 1:1-3), and the Word of God (Ps 19:7-14 Ps 119 2Pe 1:3-4). It is only in the Word of God that the Son of God is described (see Joh 20:30-31 1Jo 1:1-4).

Lesson 2:

The Power of God

Introduction

Centuries ago, God promised Abraham and Sarah they would have a son through whose offspring the world would be blessed. But there were problems. Abraham and Sarah were getting on in years, and

Sarah was barren. When told she would be the mother of Abraham's child, the child of promise, Sarah laughed. In response to her laughter, God spoke these words to Abraham:

13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear [a child,] when I am [so] old?' 14 *Is anything too difficult for the LORD?* At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." {*Ge 18:13-14, emphasis mine*}

When God rescued the nation Israel from their bondage in Egypt, he led them into the wilderness, where the "menu" was a miraculous provision of manna. But the Israelites began to grumble because they could not enjoy the variety of foods they had eaten in Egypt. In response to their grumbling, God promised to give this great company a diet of meat for an entire month. If the feeding of the 5,000 seems difficult, imagine feeding this huge congregation. Moses had the same thoughts and expressed his concerns to God:

21 But Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet thou hast said, 'I will give them meat in order that they may eat for a whole month.' 22 Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?" {*Nu 11:21-22*}

But God asked another question in response to Moses, a question vitally important to every Christian today:

And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD'S power limited? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not." {*Nu 11:23, emphasis mine*}

The answer to this question is crucial, and the answer of the Bible is clear and unequivocal:

But our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. {*Ps 115:3*}

"'Ah Lord GOD! Behold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for thee'." {*Jer 32:17*}

And looking upon [them] Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." {*Mt 19:26*}

24 The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, 25 to break Assyria in my land, and I will trample him on my mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulder. 26 This is the plan devised against the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. 27 For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate [it]? And as for his stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?" {*Isa 14:21-26*}

God's Power in Creation

The earliest manifestation of God's power is seen in the creation of the world in which we live:

For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. {*Ro 1:20*}

Throughout Scripture, the creation of the world is cited as a compelling testimony of the power of God.

(For the choir director. A Psalm of David.) 1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of his hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them he has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its

rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. {Ps 19:1-6}

6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of his mouth all their host. 7 he gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; he lays up the deeps in storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. 9 For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. 10 The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. 11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of his heart from generation to generation. 12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance. {Ps 33:6-12}

In Ps 33, the heavens testify to the existence of God and his attributes and thus proclaim his glory. {Ps 19:1-6} David continues the theme of creation's proclamation of God's character in Ps 33 where the power of God is highlighted. Verse 6 states the power of God in creating the world, emphasizing that all this took place by the mere speaking of a word (see Ge 1:3ff. Heb 11:3 2Pe 3:5). In verse 7, David indicates God not only created the heavens, he controls them. And in verses 10 and following, David goes on to tell us God likewise controls the affairs of men; God is in control of history.

(For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.) And he said, 1 "I love thee, oh LORD, my strength." 2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3 I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies. 4 The cords of death encompassed me, And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. 5 The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. 6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God for help; he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry for help before him came into his ears. 7 Then the earth shook and quaked; and the foundations of the mountains were trembling And were shaken, because he was angry. 8 Smoke went up out of his nostrils, And fire from his mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. 9 he bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under his feet. 10 And he rode upon a cherub and flew; and he sped upon the wings of the wind. 11 he made darkness his hiding place, his canopy around him, Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies. 12 From the brightness before him passed his thick clouds, hailstones and coals of fire. 13 The LORD also thundered in the heavens, And the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. 14 And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them, And lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them. 15 Then the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were laid bare At thy rebuke, oh LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. 16 he sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. 17 he delivered me from my strong enemy, And from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me. 18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my stay. 19 he brought me forth also into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me. {Ps 18:1-19}

Ps 18 praises God for his strength, strength in which he can take refuge (see verses 1-2). Verses 3-7 praise God for the deliverance he gave David from the hand of his enemy, Saul (see also verse 1). David was in great distress, and God rescued him. David poetically depicts in verses 7-15 God's response to his cry for help, as though God called upon all the forces of nature to come to his aid. In a word, David tells his readers God will, so to speak, move heaven and earth to deliver one of his children in distress. We can trust in God and find in him a place of refuge, because he is the one true God whose power includes the control of all the forces of nature. {1}

God's Power Demonstrated at the Exodus

After having first displayed his power at creation, God's second great demonstration of power is seen at the Exodus,

1 And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go that they may celebrate a feast to me in the wilderness.'" 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is